

Insights into Halacha

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Understanding

SH'NAYIM MIKRA

V'ECHAD TARGUM

Ed. note: Rabbi Spitz's footnotes are extensive and they should be examined on his website if you want sources and interesting extra comments

There is a well known Gemara in Brachot that states “A person should always complete his [study of the] parasha with the congregation - [by studying] SH'NAYIM MIKRA V'ECHAD TARGUM. Anyone who does this will have extended days and years.” Learning the text of the weekly parasha twice along with the targum once (keep reading for explanation) is a segula for long life.

What many do not know is that this statement of Chazal is actually codified in halacha.

The Baal HaTurim famously comments that this halacha can be gleaned from the first verse in Sh'mot: The parasha begins V'EILEH SH'MOT BNEI YISRAEL - “And these are the names of Bnei Yisrael”. The Baal HaTurim remarks that this passage stands for (roshei teivot of the Hebrew words, translated as...)

“And the person who learns (or sings) the weekly parasha SH'NAYIM MIKRA V'ECHAD TARGUM in a sweet straight voice, will live many long years (have an extremely long life).

Translating ‘Targum’

Now that we have seen that that such a great reward awaits those who strictly adhere this, there is only one thing left to ascertain: What precisely is the Mitzva? Obviously, it means to recite the weekly Torah portion twice, plus targum once; but what exactly does targum refer to, and what is its purpose?

This is actually a dispute among the Rishonim. Several are of the opinion that the purpose of targum is that it is not just a simple translation, but also adds layers of explanation to every word. Consequently, according to this opinion, the purpose of reading the parasha with targum is to learn the Torah in a way that allows us to understand it better. Practically, according to the Tur and Shulchan Aruch, this means that targum here would mean learning the parasha with Rashi’s commentary, as it is the best commentary to unlock the p'shat of the Chumash.

Others maintain that the halacha is referring to the targum as we know it: Targum Onkelus, as the Gemara in Megila states that this translation of the Torah was actually given to us by Moshe Rabeinu. The Rema held that

therefore reading Targum Onkelus is like reading from the Torah itself, and hence is preferable for performing this Mitzva. Accordingly, by reading the parasha with its original targum, we are re-presenting the Torah weekly in the same manner as it was given at Har Sinai.

Some opine that this is Rashi's own shita when it comes to SH'NAYIM MIKRA V'ECHAD TARGUM. The result of this machloket is that Rashi would maintain that Targum Onkelus is preferable while the Rosh was of the opinion that Rashi's commentary is preferable. That means according to Rashi, ironically, it's possible that one might not even fulfill his obligation of targum if he learns Rashi's own commentary!

The Shulchan Aruch cites both opinions and rules that one can fulfill his obligation with either one, Targum Onkelus or Rashi. However he concludes that it is preferable to do both, as that way one can satisfy both interpretations.

The Taz explains that if someone does not understand either one, he can read the original Tzennah U'Renna in German (presumably Yiddish) to enable his understanding, and with this he fulfills his targum obligation. The Kitzur Shulchan Aruch and Mishna Berura rule this way as well. In this vein, several contemporary authorities, including Rav

Moshe Feinstein and Rav Moshe Sternbuch, ruled that nowadays one may perform his targum obligation by reading an English translation of Rashi's commentary, if that is the way one best understands it.

Shnayim Mikra before the Seuda

The Shulchan Aruch rules that the proper time to fulfill this Mitzva is from the Sunday of the week when a given parasha is read (although some, including the Mishna Berura, maintain that one may already start on Shabbat afternoon after Mincha), over the course of the whole week and preferably finishing before the Shabbat day meal. However, it is important to note that this is only Mitzva Min HaMuvchar. The Mishna Berura rules that one should not push off his Seudat Shabbat past Chatzot HaYom just to finish shnayim mikra before the seuda. Likewise, if one is having guests over for the seuda, he should not make them wait just so he can finish SH'NAYIM MIKRA before the seuda.

However, there are many authorities who hold that optimally, it is preferable to complete SH'NAYIM MIKRA on, or at least finish, by Erev Shabbat.

What time is Mincha?

The Shulchan Aruch adds that if one has not yet finished SH'NAYIM MIKRA before the seuda, then he has

“until Mincha” to finish, and if not, the Wednesday of the next week, and concluding that b’di-eved one has until Shmini Atzeret / Simchat Torah to catch up for the whole year.

The Shulchan Aruch’s enigmatic choice of words led to an interesting dispute among authorities: What did the Shulchan Aruch mean by “until Mincha”? Some posit that he was referring to a personal Mincha, meaning that a person can finish this Mitzva up until he himself actually davens Mincha. Others maintain that his intent was until the time of Mincha, meaning Mincha Gedola, the earliest time that one may daven Mincha. A third approach is that it refers to the time when Mincha is davened in the local shul. A fourth opinion is that it is referring to Mincha Ketana, two and a half halachic hours before sh’kiya, the optimal time for davening Mincha. Interestingly, there does not seem to be any clear cut consensus on this issue.

One Small Step For Man...

Another issue that raises much debate among the halachic decisors is what the proper order and way to fulfill SH'NAYIM MIKRA V'ECHAD TARGUM is, and at which points one may stop; whether pasuk by pasuk, section by section, parasha by parasha, or all at once. There does not seem to be a clear consensus on this either. Although for many, to clear a

time block to do SH'NAYIM MIKRA at once may be difficult, it might be a good idea to follow the Mishna Berura’s advice and employ the Vilna Gaon’s method of immediately after one’s daily Shacharit, doing a small part every day (i.e. on Sunday do up to Sheini; on Monday up to Shlishi, etc.). By following this technique one will have finished this Mitzva by Shabbat, every week.

Just Do It!

Many contemporary authorities are at a loss to explain the perceived lackadaisicalness that many have concerning this Mitzva. These Gedolim, including Rav Moshe Feinstein, Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, Rav Shmuel Halevi Wosner, and Rav Ovadia Yosef, zichronam l’vracha, as well as did yblch”t Rav Moshe Sternbuch, and, stressed its significance, and decried the fact that it seems to have fallen into disuse, with several averring that there is even a Mitzva of chinuch for a parent to teach SH'NAYIM MIKRA’s importance to his children! So, although there is halachic discussion as to what constitutes the proper order and way to fulfill this Mitzva, nonetheless, one shouldn’t lose sight of the forest for the trees; the most essential point is that one should actually make the effort to do it. Who would willingly want to turn down a promise by the Gemara for an

extremely long life?!

For any questions, comments or for the full Mareh Mekomot / sources, please email the author: yspitz@ohr.edu

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Disclaimer: This is not a comprehensive guide, rather a brief summary to raise awareness of the issues. In any real case one should ask a competent Halachic authority.

Rabbi Yehuda Spitz's English halacha sefer, "Food: A Halachic Analysis" (Mosaica/ Feldheim) containing over 500 pages featuring over 30 comprehensive chapters discussing the myriad halachic issues pertaining to food, is now available online and in bookstores everywhere."